

# Fredericton's own REDEYE

Story by JOEY KILFOIL  
Photos by ANNE KILFOIL

"This one is dedicated to the Brunswick staff," says Brian Bourne, smiling and sweating from under his mirror sunglasses. He turns to cue keyboardist Guy Turner and soon the air is filled with the beautiful piano riff that opens Springsteen's "Rosalita." Sitting in a somewhat chilly Rollin' Keg on this Monday night, I can't help but feel a little bit honored. Oh, sure, any student newspaper could have a song dedicated to them, but Springsteen's Rosalita? Wow.

The band is Redeye, a four-piece rock and roll band that has, in recent years, become Fredericton's favorite musical sons. Famous for changes in personnel that happen more often than Christmas, all four present members seem to think this lineup is the one that's going to last. Although once a seven-piece featuring two lead vocalists and two exceptionally good lead guitarists, Redeye is an act without gimmicks: There are no smoke bombs, dry ice fog, flash pots, costume changes or gaudy makeup. But what is special about Redeye becomes apparent after watching them for only a short time: it is the story of four very strong (and very different) personalities, people playing music for a living and trying to have fun and survive at the same time.

Bassist/lead vocalist Brian Bourne is the focus of the group onstage. Seemingly inexhaustible, his constant motion, solid bass playing, and moody face make him a definite watchable. Vocally, he is beyond reproach; his voice is crisp and powerful while still retaining clarity and emotion.

Keyboardist Guy Turner who also does backup vocals, is obviously a man who likes his work. Approaching the bank of keyboards with the type of silly grin a young boy might have on his face when telling his friend a dirty joke, he sometimes seems to talk to his keyboards. Like Brian, he is constantly in motion, whether marching soldier-like about the stage or climbing on top of a wooden road case for a frenzied synthesizer break.

Drummer Wayne Blanchard - who will also be singing some backup in the near future - provides an interesting contrast to Brian and Guy. Sitting bolt upright with eyes closed, he actually appears to be meditating while never missing a beat. His seemingly lazy style of drumming defies the complexity and precision of his moves.

Guitarist/backing vocalist Jack Van Wart is even more contradictory to the traditional rock star image than Wayne. Instead of running around the stage playing guitar solos and looking as if he had a crab up his shorts, Van Wart (known as "Johnny Vee" to many) is content to stand quietly behind his microphone and get on with playing guitar. A husky individual, he stares down at his black Stratocaster through half-closed eyes, and the relatively simple solos and phrases which he plays with ease give little indication of his true talent.

Of course, behind every great band is a technician, and Redeye is no exception. Kevin Pottie, their sound and light man and general troubleshooter when it comes to equipment, is the person who can turn good music into a memorable and entertaining show. A commanding, bearded figure often seen in a red baseball cap, his anonymity stems from the curse Bourne by all technicians you never notice them unless they screw up.

To trace the complete evolution of Redeye to what it is today would be a formidable task, but as accurate an outline as can be had comes from Jack, who, along with Kevin, is the only original member of the band. A Frederictonian originally from Saint John, he started playing guitar at 15 and was getting paid for it a year later. Now, at 30, he has played in literally dozens of bands and has the dubious honor of having his name appear more than any other in the Fredericton Music Flashback published earlier this year. Although many of those bands have since been forgotten, a few that Jack mentions include Rock Bottom, Friar Tuck, Montana Moose, and Jibbero; which is where the Redeye legend

really starts. It was in 1976 that Jack, Bill MacAuley (who now plays keyboards with Richie Oakley's band), bassist Brian Lean, and drummer Jimmy Staid formed Redeye. Staid left shortly thereafter to back up Kenny Tobias, and this proved to be just the beginning of an infamous number of personnel changes for which Redeye would become known.

"We're a popular band, that's all," says Jack of Redeye which has been a professional, full-time band for 2 1/2 years now. Although he says Redeye is now working on being a good bar band, Jack says there will eventually be a need for more original material and he definitely wants to do more of it. However, he says it must be worked in gradually since "people aren't used to it."

Redeye currently includes two originals in their act: "Fever Dream," a Brian Bourne composition "all about sex in taverns," and an as-yet untitled instrumental which Jack says was more or less put together by the entire band. Jack writes a bit of music with the band and says it is a lot easier to work with the new band. He does not write words and leaves that up to Brian.

"Brian can write words...he's got words up his asshole."

Wayne Blanchard is an interesting person. He smiles a lot. In fact, he always looks so happy that one wonders what he's up to. After talking with him a while, however, the reason for his demeanor becomes obvious: he is 28 years old, married and getting paid to do something he enjoys.

Wayne, who lived in Britain for five years and formed a new wave band before returning to Fredericton, lists among his former bands "Froth," and "Mowgli and the Donuts." He joined Redeye just over two years ago, when then-drummer Neil Woodiwiss couldn't go on the road when the band was starting to play full-time. Wayne, who knew the members of Redeye from before, says all band members have fairly equal input into their act.

"If it was only a one-sided thing, the band would always be susceptible to failure," he says.

Wayne says he still has doubts every week. Of his own performance, sometimes, he says he feels great. Other times, he says, "you see how bad you really are."

"You never know about anything in the music business," he says. "It's so susceptible to change...just look at 10 years ago."

Wayne was the manager of a local retail store before joining Redeye, and says he has keen interest in the business side of the band as well as the performing side. In fact, although the band is self-managed, it is Wayne who looks after the books.

"You never find people who want to look after the money, but if you want to avoid pitfalls, somebody's got to do it."

Wayne - who is learning to play guitar because, as a drummer, he claims he is not very musical - says the current band members are more musical than earlier lineups and they are more willing to contribute. He says he feels more comfortable now and notes that there was "always tension" in some of the older versions of the band, when there were up to seven people and no manager.

An army brat originally from Pembroke, Ontario, Wayne grew up in Germany and Britain and landed in Fredericton via Oromocto in the late 50's.

Although Redeye has toured all over the Maritimes and were well-received last year on a trip to Montreal, Wayne says there is really no point in going that far when the band has no records to promote. However, his underlying sense of optimism comes through in his observation of Redeye's present state:

"Things are getting healthy in a real hurry."

Brian Bourne, who nails from Thetford Mines, Quebec, was himself a student at UNB for a year in the early 70's. After acquiring an average of about 15 per cent for the year, he dropped out and went to India for a while. Upon returning to Fredericton he worked as a janitor at Lady Dunn Hall for about eight weeks in the spring of 1974. It

was at this time that one of Fredericton's more famous bands, Joint Effort came to be.

Brian recalls seeing the four-piece acoustic group at a performance at Head Hall. At that time, he says, they were very folkie - all acoustic, with no bass. After the show, Brian says, he and the band joined "about 28 people" in room 318 of Bridges House for an exceptionally wild party. It was at this time that Brian joined the other four - Tim and Terry Tufts, Grant Harrison and Rick Bastedo - as the bass player for Joint Effort. At this time he was using a \$20 Pender (yes, Pender) bass which he had purchased fifth-hand. After playing an assortment of originals, bluegrass and country-rock around Fredericton, Rick and Grant left the band and Brian and the Tufts brothers went to Ottawa where they started playing as a three-piece bluegrass band and changed their name to Redrock Hotel. They eventually found a drummer from Moncton, Mario Melanson, and began playing a little more rock. The band released a single, "Hitchhiker's Dream," which was fairly popular in the Fredericton area but had no national success.

A meeting between Brian and Wayne in a local music store in the early part of 1979 was the key factor in Brian's joining Redeye. Wayne told Brian Redeye needed a bass player, and shortly after he returned to Ottawa, Brian got a telegram from Wayne offering him the job.

Brian started playing guitar at age 11 and didn't start playing bass until the spring of 1974. Although he considers himself a guitar player first, he sums up his musical aspirations thusly: "I want to be a drummer."

Conrad Yavis, Redeye's former lead vocalist, left in July and Brian found himself stuck with the job of singing all the songs himself. He remembers Conrad informing the band at 1 p.m. that he was leaving, when they had a show at 8:30 that night. Brian says he just went ahead and did it - with the help of several "cheat sheets" - and didn't really think about it. It somehow worked, he says, and the band decided to stick with him as lead singer.

Of his fellow players, Brian says you have to respect them or you can't play on the same stage as them. He admits they all have a lot to learn.

"As soon as you stop learning, you're dead," he says. "Because that's when you stop progressing."

Although he wants to do more originals and wants to record, he says right now he wants to keep playing rock and roll and he wants to do it forever. However, he says, "you can't take rock and roll seriously."

Guy Turner has been playing with Redeye for five months. At 19, he is more than 10 years younger than Jack, but still fits in perfectly and gets along with the other members of the band. Although he played with Desert Oak for awhile, he is probably best known as the co-founder of The Last Looper Alive Band. (Looper is his nickname.) It was while he was playing with Looper at the Moon Palace that Redeye saw him and asked him to join. At first, he says, he was hesitant, because of school (he was in his first year of college) and his own band. But after he thought about it he changed his mind and joined them in April.

Guy says he is looking forward towards a career as a professional musician. Besides playing guitar and a little bit of drums, he is now teaching himself saxophone. He says he may someday play guitar with Redeye but is now doing enough with just keyboards.

Guy says he is learning a lot from his fellow performers and the band is a joint effort all the way (no pun intended). He says they select songs depending on what Brian can sing and what the people want to hear, but they wouldn't attempt a song they could not do good job on.

Guy says he will play with Redeye until "something goes wrong," at which time he plans to enroll in music college. His formal training includes eight years of classical piano and he now practises at least two hours a day. "If you don't practise, it just doesn't work," he says.

For now, anyway, things seem to be working for Redeye.

